

Message Text

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ACTION EB-08

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C O N F I D E N T I A L RABAT 5239

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: EMIN, MO
SUBJ: PHOSPHATES: PROPOSED MOROCCAN/SAHARAN RESERVE STUDY

REF: STATE 210471

1. AFTER CAREFULLY REVIEWING REFTEL REQUEST, EMBASSY HAS CONCLUDED THAT BEFORE MAKING DEMARCHE, NUMBER OF POINTS SHOULD BE CLARIFIED WITH BUMINES IN EFFORT TO IMPROVE PROSPECTS OF SECURING GOM/OCPC CONCURRENCE. WE ARE CONCERNED THAT WITHOUT FURTHER TALKING POINTS, REQUEST COULD TRIGGER SUSPICIONS AS TO MOTIVE OF RESEARCH, ESPECIALLY WITH RESPECT TO DEPOSITS LOCATED IN FORMER SPANISH SAHARA.

2. AS DEPARTMENT AND BUMINES PROBABLY AWARE, THERE IS CONTINUING RUMOR--BUBBLING UP IN THE NON-MOROCCAN PRESS EVERY SO OFTEN--THAT SAHARAN DEPOSITS ARE LARGEST IN THE WORLD. OCP, OF COURSE, HAS REGULARLY DERIDED IDEA, SAYING THAT WHILE THERE IS OBVIOUSLY AN ATTRACTIVE DEPOSIT IN THE SAHARA, IT WILL BE UNVIABLE FOR MANY YEARS TO COME, AND IN ANY CASE IS NOT NEEDED FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE. CONFIRMATION THAT DEPOSITS ARE FAR LARGER THAN PRESENTLY ESTIMATED COULD WELL HAVE GEOPOLITICAL REPERCUSSIONS FAR TRANSCENDING THE INTERNATIONAL PHOSPHATE INDUSTRY--AT LEAST FOR AS LONG AS THE FUTURE OF THE SAHARA IS UNRESOLVED.

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3. AS IT HAPPENED, EMBASSY'S CONCERN WAS FUELED BY VISIT ON SAME DAY REFTEL RECEIVED OF JOHN GASKELL, HEAD OF MINERAL ASSESSMENT UNIT OF ROBERTSON RESEARCH INTERNATIONAL LTD, WITH HEAD OFFICES IN TY'N-Y COED, LLANRHOS, NORTH WALES. GASKELL--EN ROUTE TO UK FROM NIGERIA--SAID HIS WASHINGTON OFFICE HAD INFORMED HIM THAT A BUMINES RFP CONCERNING PROPOSED MOROCCAN/SAHARAN RESEARCH STUDY, WHICH HAD BEEN PRE-

VIOUSLY WITHDRAWN FOR REASONS UNKNOWN TO ROBERTSON, WAS AGAIN ABOUT TO BE TENDERED, BUT THAT ACTUAL ISSUANCE OF TENDER HAS TO AWAIT SOME SORT OF STATE DEPARTMENT DEMARCHE TO GOM. GASKELL WAS ASKED TO CHECK OUT FACTS WITH OCP AND EMBASSY, WHICH HE UNFORTUANTELY DID IN THAT ORDER.

4. OCP'S RESOURCE PLANNER MOUSTAFA HAFEZ, EXPRESSED COMPLETE IGNORANCE ABOUT SUBJECT, AND ADMITTED TO NOT A LITTLE SURPRISE AT GASKELL'S INQUIRY, OPINING THAT IT WOULD APPEAR TO PROBE INTO DOMAIN OF PRIVILEGED CORPORATE INFORMATION. HAFEZ WAS PARTICULARLY SURPRISED THAT GASKELL ALSO ENQUIRED ABOUT "SPANISH SAHARA", SINCE TERRITORY NO LONGER EXISTED AND MINING ACTIVITY IN THAT AREA WAS OF LITTLE IMPORTANCE TO OCP'S OVERALL OPERATIONS. SENSING HE WAS GETTING INTO DEEP WATERS, GASKELL SAID HE DROPPED ISSUE AND CAME TO SEE US FOR ANY GUIDANCE WE MIGHT HAVE. WE RESPONDED THAT WHILE EMBASSY HAS BEEN ALERTED TO PROPOSED RESEARCH, WE HAD AS YET MADE NO DEMARCHE AND WOULD BE SEEKING INSTRUCTIONS FROM WASHINGTON. GASKELL APOLOGIZED FOR POSSIBLY MUDDYING WATERS AND DEPARTED. COMMENT: EMBASSY WOULD APPRECIATE RECEIVING INFO ON BONA FIDES OF ROBERTSON RESEARCH IN EVENT GASKELL TURNS UP AGAIN. END COMMENT

5. BELIEVE WE SHOULD HAVE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IN ORDER TO CARRY OUT REQUESTED DEMARCHE
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- IS MAS DATA OPEN INFORMATION?
- IF NOT, WILL ALL INFORMATION IN MAS REGARDING PHOSPHATES BE AVAILABLE TO GOM/OCP, INCLUDING ANALYSIS OF US RESERVE BASE?
- IF NOT, WHAT CAN GOM/OCP EXPECT TO OBTAIN AS QUID PRO QUO?
- WHAT ARE OTHER BENEFITS WHICH OCP COULD EXPECT FROM PARTICIPATING?
- WHO IN OCP EXPRESSED INTEREST IN STUDY?
- HOW WIDELY SHARED IS THIS INTEREST?
- WILL ANALYSIS COVER MESKALA DEPOSIT, WHICH WE UNDERSTAND IS SHORTLY TO BE ASSESSED BY SOVIET TEAM OF GEOLOGISTS?
- HOW WOULD SAHARAN DEPOSITS BE ACCOUNTED FOR? (WE SEE HERE LOOMING PROBLEM OF DEFINING WHAT IS MOROCCAN PHOSPHATE BASE, AND VERY LIKELY OBSTACLE TO GOM/OCP COOPERATION FROM THE START OF SAHARAN RESERVES WERE TO BE SEPARATELY CATEGORIZED.)

6. WE WOULD LIKE TO RESERVE ON TACTICS FOR MAKING DEMARCHE UNTIL WE HAVE RESPONSES TO ABOVE QUESTIONS IN HAND.
MOFFAT

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